



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Great Smoky Mountains
National Park

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Great Smoky Mountains News Release

Release Date: November 14, 2016

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Park Invites Public Comment on Mt. Sterling Solar Project

Great Smoky Mountains National Park officials invite the public to comment on a proposed sustainable energy project through December 13, 2016. Duke Energy has proposed installing an array of solar panels, coupled with a zinc-air battery, to power critical park communications equipment located atop the remote Mt. Sterling in the Haywood County area of the park. Duke Energy currently delivers power to the site along a 3.5-mile overhead line that extends from the park boundary at Mt. Sterling Road (Hwy NC284) to the Mt. Sterling Fire Lookout Tower.

The radio equipment is a vital component of the park's emergency communication system. The solar microgrid would operate separately from the energy grid and would allow greater reliability while using a renewable energy source. The proposed solar array would consist of 30 panels and would cover an area approximately 40 feet long, 15 feet wide and 10.5 feet tall at the highest point. A small area south of the panels would need to be kept free of tall trees to minimize shading. Current estimates show that fewer than 10 trees would need to be cleared. If approved and installed, the microgrid would allow the existing overhead line to be decommissioned and the existing maintained corridor would return to a natural state.

Park staff have initiated the National Environmental Policy Act, National Historic Preservation Act, and other compliance processes to evaluate potential adverse and beneficial impacts of the proposed project on the natural, cultural, and human environment. Staff invite the public to comment on the proposed project using the National Park Service's Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website and following the link titled

“Mt. Sterling Sustainable Energy Project” at <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/grsm> or by US Mail to Superintendent, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, 107 Park Headquarters Road, Gatlinburg, TN 37738. Duke Energy recently filed details on the proposed project with the North Carolina Utilities Commission, which must approve the project prior to implementation. If approved by the National Park Service and the North Carolina Utilities Commission, implementation could begin in Spring 2017.

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